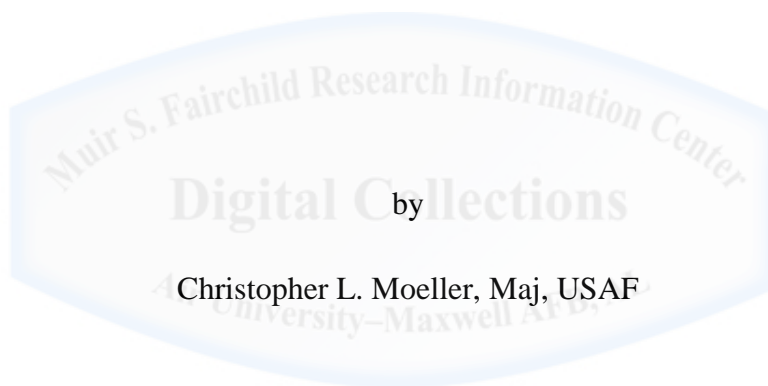AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

USING NEW MEDIA FOR INFORMATION OPERATIONS: A SYRIAN INSURGENCY CASE STUDY

by

Christopher L. Moeller, Maj, USAF

A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

Advisor: Dr. Robert M. Kerr

Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

April 2014

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US government or the Department of Defense. In accordance with Air Force Instruction 51-303, it is not copyrighted, but is the property of the United States government.

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of new media has changed the way the world receives information. In military operations, information support operations play a crucial role in the outcome of a campaign by influencing public opinion. In the Syrian civil war that started in 2012, the insurgents turned to new media to influence public opinion and gain support for their cause. The insurgents' information operations demonstrate how new media enables state and non-state actors to share their narrative with a worldwide audience without the need for traditional media sources. The Syrian rebels executed deliberate information support operations targeting four distinct audiences: the population within Syria for moral and political support, the population in Middle East states for moral and financial support, the global Syrian diaspora for moral and financial support, and the population in the West for financial, moral and political support. Examining how the insurgents used new media to direct their messages reveals techniques that the US military must explore to enhance their information operations in the prolific new media environment.

Introduction

"Public opinion wins wars. That is as true now as ever. In order to facilitate the flow of news to the public in the impending operations, we are drawing upon past experiences and hope to profit from them."[1] These words, spoken by General Dwight Eisenhower in April 1944 stress the value of effective information operations to military operations. It is the responsibility of military leaders to determine how to communicate their narrative to the intended audience to ensure public opinion helps them win the war. Since World War II, advances in technology have greatly increased the amount and speed of information available to the public during military operations. Today, anyone with internet access can share and view information globally, and successful military operations utilize these advances in information sharing. The insurgent forces in the Syrian civil war exemplify a group that capitalizes on these advances to bolster support for their cause.

Syrian insurgents demonstrate how new media can be used effectively as part of information operations. They continue to execute a deliberate campaign using new media to target specific audiences to generate support for their cause. Understanding the history and operational environment of the Syrian civil war is imperative to comprehending why new media is a valuable information tool. Examination of the methods used by the insurgents highlights techniques that the US military needs to adopt to utilize new media to enhance its own military information support operations.

History of Syria insurgency

Although the civil war in Syria officially began in July 2012, it had its beginnings some 18 months earlier during the "Arab Spring" in early 2011. Hoping to spark a revolution similar to the successful and relatively peaceful regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt, people within Syria

began to call for changes within their state. Small demonstrations began throughout Syria in January 2011, but the overall uprising escalated on March 18th.[2] On that date, in the southwest Syria town of Daraa, protesters gathered to demand the release of a group of teenage boys who were arrested 12 days earlier for spray-painting "the people want to topple the regime" on a wall in the town.[3] During the protest, security forces shot into the crowd, killing demonstrators.[4] As will become commonplace to this conflict, amateur video of the demonstration showing the slain protesters appeared on YouTube within 24 hours of the shooting.[5]

Following the events in Daraa, more demonstrations occurred across Syria, some of which were organized on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Despite some concessions made by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, including the resignation of his cabinet, demonstrations demanding regime change continued.[6] Use of violence by Syrian security forces escalated quickly, and in April 2011, Syrian military forces deployed across the state to address the protests.[7] Over the next 15 months, the conflict between the government and the opposition forces within Syria reached a level where the International Committee of the Red Cross classified the conflict as a Civil War.[8]

The groups involved in the violent opposition of the Assad regime are referred to as rebels, opposition forces, terrorists, and, most descriptively, insurgents. According to counterinsurgency theorist David Galula, an insurgent is someone who participates in a protracted struggle to overthrow the existing order.[9] The insurgency in Syria has been characterized as unorganized with more than 1,000 different insurgent groups identified as taking part in the civil war.[10] In attempts to organize the insurgents, some groups have formed coalitions with other groups who have similar objectives for what post-Assad Syria should look like. Two examples are the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Islamic Front.

Formed by a group of defected Syrian military officers, the FSA is one of the first and largest coalitions.[11] The FSA outlined its objective to unite those who oppose the Assad regime against the Syrian Army and replace the regime with a secular government in its formation speech posted on YouTube on 29 July 2011.[12, 13] Another major opposition group is the Islamic Front. The Islamic Front formed in 22 November 2013 with the goal of defeating the current regime and forming an Islamic state.[14] Like the FSA, it also posted its formation speech on YouTube.[15] The large number and diversity of insurgent groups has made it difficult for supporters of the insurgency to determine the insurgent groups' objectives and subsequently decide which group they want to support. The largest of the insurgent groups have undertaken significant information operations to garner support for their causes.

Why New Media Became Important

The lack of traditional journalist coverage of the Syrian civil war has driven insurgents to find other ways to communicate their narrative around the globe. One underlying factor contributing to this lack of coverage is that the government of Syria has restricted journalist access. The Syrian government expelled foreign correspondents from most of the main news agencies, including Reuters and Al Jazeera, by the end of March 2012.[16] Agence France-Presse was the only Western news organization present in Daraa in spring 2011 as violence escalated, but shortly after the first casualties, the government evicted this organization from the country as well.[17] Foreign reporters from Syrian allies, such as Russia, China, and Iran remain in the country, but their reporting is noticeably pro-regime.[18] Throughout the conflict, some journalists from Western news agencies have received invitations from the Syrian government to return to Syria, but the government dictates where they travel and what they see.[19] Lastly, whether by invitation of the government or their own accord in regions controlled by rebels, journalists are

reluctant to go to Syria because of the inherent danger they might face. In 2013 the Committee to Protect Journalists declared Syria to be the most dangerous place for journalists in the world following the death of 29 journalists in a single year.[20]

New media has enabled insurgent groups to share their narrative, garner support for their cause, and essentially level the information playing field with government-controlled media, thereby using new media as a force multiplier.[21] New media is defined as, "Products and services that provide information or entertainment using computer or the internet, and not by traditional methods such as television and newspapers."[22] Examples of new media include social media such as Facebook and Twitter, media sharing sites such as YouTube, and traditional websites. The effective use of new media is possible due to the proliferation of camera phones and the advent of social media that enable citizens to share and report on events in Syria in near real time.[23] Since the first death associated with the uprising in Syria, new media has broadcast the conflict. According to YouTube figures, between January 2012 and September 2013, over a million videos related to the Syrian conflict appeared on YouTube.[24] The abundance of video footage that has streamed from within Syria has driven some to label this the "first YouTube war."[25]

Additionally, insurgents turned to Twitter, Facebook, organizational websites, and other forms of new media to provide updates.[26] Following the protests in March 2011, the Syrian government unblocked access to Facebook and YouTube.[27] Many believe this move to be a tactical ploy by the government to monitor opposition group activity on the government run internet.[28] To avoid monitoring by the government, many insurgents access the internet through proxy servers and maintain their websites outside of Syria.[29]

Branding and New Media

The large number of insurgent groups operating within Syria and the massive quantities of new media information available has made it challenging for the insurgent groups with competing narratives to distinguish themselves and their actions to gain support. With so many groups vying for support in Syria, getting credit for action is almost as important as the action itself.[30] Information posted to a specific insurgent group's website is easy to attribute, but may not reach a population as large as those available through YouTube or Facebook. When shared by multiple users, the original source of videos or images posted on websites can become lost.

To distinguish themselves and their actions within the vast new media environment, insurgent groups have made an effort to solidify their image and legitimacy through branding. Branding, an advertising tactic, is the act of dedicating resources to narrow the gap between an organization's viewpoint and its image.[31] One often used form of branding is the development of a distinguishable emblem with symbolic meaning, which can help gain popular support for an organization.[32] Because symbols create an image that makes people want to identify with and be loyal to an organization, the selection of symbols used by insurgent groups in their branding is not just by chance, but a deliberate action by an organization.[33]

A distinguishable emblem placed on vehicles, banners, shirts, and posters highlights which insurgent group is operating within a geographic area. However, the effective placement of emblems extends into new media as well. Insurgent groups will prominently display their emblem on their webpages as well as on their Facebook and Twitter accounts. Perhaps, one of the most significant and furthest reaching uses of emblems is on videos released on YouTube. Many of the insurgent organizations have begun using digital on-screen graphics (DOGs) to take ownership of their videos. Traditional news sources use this technique to brand their information,

an example being the CNN logo placed in the corner of its videos. Embedding an insurgent group's emblem on a video as a DOG enables the viewer to distinguish who is responsible for the video and ultimately the event portrayed in the video.

Because of the DOGs, someone viewing the video does not need to translate the video or know the source to have a basic understanding of the narrative of the group which posted the video or even know which specific group has produced the video. For example, the FSA coalition has rallied its supporters under the Syrian flag from 1932.[34] This flag has a green, white, and black stripe along with three red stars. This flag is unique from the current Syrian flag which has a red, white, and black stripe and two green stars. The 1932 flag symbolizes the FSA's desire to return Syria to a pre-Assad regime.[35] Insurgent groups within the FSA have professionally designed emblems that are each unique, but all of them incorporate the three stripes and three stars of the 1932 Syrian flag.[36]

The Islamic Front emblem is distinct visually from that of the FSA. The Islamic Front emblem contains a green dome shaped design over formal Arabic script writing of the words "Islamic Front." The color green, the traditional color of Islam, and the dome design, reminiscent of the dome of a mosque, send a message of the Islamic Front's desire for an Islamic state. Even someone who is unable to read Arabic grasps the religious core of the group when viewing their emblem.

The use of symbols for branding is a powerful way the primary insurgent groups in Syria can spread their message and gain support both locally and globally. This use of emblems to brand new media supports the idea that the insurgents are executing a deliberate information support operation campaign. A video with a DOG of an emblem containing elements of the 1932 Syrian flag sends a message that the responsible group, the FSA, is fighting for a new, secular

government in Syria. A DOG featuring a green background with white lettering or a green

emblem with a dome shape communicates that the responsible group is part of the Islamic Front

coalition and is fighting for an Islamic state. This distinction is important when local populations

view new media so they are aware of which group is responsible for the event in their area.

Furthermore, when these videos are used by traditional news sources, a much larger audience

than that targeted by YouTube or a specific group's website sees the emblem (see figure 1). This

enables the responsible group to market for support around the globe.

Figure 1. An example of an insurgent DOG in a video used by CNN. The original DOG added by the insurgent group (A) communicates to the viewer that this video came from a group within the FSA because of the distinct green, black, and white stripes and three red stars. CNN brands the video again when re-broadcasting it (B), but the original DOG remains. (screen capture from CNN.com, "Rebels Attack Army Barracks in Damascus," *CNN.com* video, 10 October 2012, http://www.cnn.com/video/?/video/world/2012/10/05/ pkg-walsh-damascus-syria-battles.cnn&iref=videosearch&video_referrer=http %3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2Fsearch%2F%3Fquery%3Dsyrian%20rebels %26primaryType%3Dvideo%26sortBy%3Ddate%26intl%3Dfalse#/video/world/2012/10/05 /pkg-walsh-damascus-syria-battles.cnn.)

Insurgent Uses of New Media

One characteristic that is common for most insurgencies is that they are generally not powerful enough to defeat the counterinsurgency in direct military engagement.[37] To overcome their military deficit, an insurgency must gain the support of the population and weaken support for the counterinsurgency.[38] A successful insurgency must develop a cause which the population can rally behind and subsequently support the insurgency through active fighting or passive agreement.[39] The insurgent groups in Syria utilize information support operations, which Joint Publication 3-13 defines as deliberate attempts to convey selected information to friendly, adversary, and neutral populations, to spread their cause and gain popular support.[40] A review of the new media uses by the insurgents in Syria reveals four audiences targeted by insurgent information support operations: the population within Syria, the Arab population within the Middle East, the Syrian diaspora, and the Western governments and population.

The insurgent groups within Syria are using new media successfully in their information support operations to target multiple and specific populations. Many insurgent groups have professionally designed webpages as well as active YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter accounts. For example, in September 2012, the group Suqour al-Sham, a member of the Islamic Front, held a conference for its media team to give them training on improving their uses of YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.[41]

Gaining Support within Syria

Only 24 percent of the Syrian population has internet access; however, insurgent groups are effectively using new media to disseminate information and generate support within their state.[42] New media sources provide the insurgent groups other vehicles thru which to broadcast information, targeting the portion of the population living within the cities. One use of new

media by insurgent groups to generate support within Syria is highlighting the military and civic service successes of their organization. Insurgent groups will develop news stories from within their region that highlight the military successes of its members and its leadership.[43] Additionally, and possibly more importantly, insurgents post videos of actions taken by the group to make positive changes in the communities. For example, one group has posted videos, which are distinctly marked with DOGs, of members of that organization rebuilding a school after a battle with Syrian government forces.[44] The video shows a member of the organization, in a polo shirt instead of military gear, reporting from the school site in a well-edited video. Another video promoted a groups establishment of a civilian hospital in their region using supplies donated from Libya.[45] Even if the population within Syria does not have access to the internet, a television news network may run the footage taken from new media sources which makes it available to the population of Syria via satellite television.

Despite the Syrian population's limited internet access, resident insurgent groups have also been able to use Facebook effectively through the roughly 70 Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) operating in towns throughout Syria.[46] These organizations originally started to coordinate and document revolutionary activities in Syria during the uprising in 2011.[47] Since then, they have evolved to provide real-time information about the insurgency via Facebook.[48] The LCCs organize protests in the local area using social media, disseminate information about ongoing military and humanitarian operations, and provide information on individual insurgents killed in the fighting.[49] Insurgent groups use LCCs for tactical purposes as well. LCCs have posted on the position and movement of regime forces and have even called for support during battle.[50] In one post, a LCC reported, "A Free Syrian Army battalion is trapped in Harem by Assad's military…to all battalion in the area, provide cover to get them out."[51]

Gaining Support from the Middle East Population

Although the objective of an insurgency is to gain the support of the population, garnering outside support is also highly beneficial for insurgents. Outside support can come in many forms: moral, political, technical, financial, and military.[52] Insurgent information support operations targeting the population within the Middle East appear primarily focused on gaining moral and financial support.

The constant flow of information and images emanating from Syria, combined with increased use of new media, has enabled individuals and organizations in the Middle East with little or no affiliation with the insurgent groups to exert influence on the operations.[53] At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, English was the primary language used on Twitter when discussing events in Syria.[54] By June 2011, Arabic surpassed English and became the prominent language on Twitter posts relating to the insurgency.[55] Recognizing this change in the social media environment has enabled insurgent groups to use the most effective new media to target their desired audience.

For example, the professionally designed website of Al-Tawhid Brigade, an Islamic fundamentalist group operating in Syria but unassociated with a coalition at this time, is only available in Arabic, but has a multitude of videos and pictures of the success of the brigade.[56] Al-Tawhid is aware that their primary supporters are Arabic speaking, so their website focuses on reaching their Arabic audience. The opening video on the Al-Tawhid Brigade website has been viewed over 12,000 times since its posting in May 2013. Because of the limited internet access within Syria, the assumption is that the effort put into this website is intended to draw support from a wider, Islamic-Arabic region. Indications of the success of the new media use are evident

in comments left in Arabic by visitors to the webpage, such as, "We cannot be there to fight with you, but you are in our hearts."[57]

Besides moral support, insurgent groups have made a very concerted effort to use new media to generate financial support. An Al Jazeera editor familiar with the region noted that insurgent groups began to produce video footage with the specific purpose of appealing to financial supporters within the region.[58] Groups have gone so far as to conduct missions with a camera crew ready to film. They then turn around and show it to financial supporters to highlight what their donations accomplished and hint at what more could be done with larger additional donations.[59] As a RAND report on the use of the internet by another insurgent group noted, "Social netwar involves a lot of theater."[60]

In addition to using video footage and professionally designed websites to gain financial support, insurgent groups have turned to Twitter. Twitter gives fundraisers the ability to target donors in states that have shut down the local public sites that support the insurgency. In Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government shut down an online organization formed to raise money for the Syrian insurgents after only one day.[61] Insurgent fundraisers are aware of these challenges and use Twitter which is unblocked in most states to target individuals for support.[62] An example is Hajaj al-Ajmi, an FSA supporter who lives in Kuwait.[63] Ajmi uses Twitter to appeal for funds to support the FSA, and since May 2012, his number of followers has increased from 42,000 to 430,000.[64] These uses of new media for moral and financial support within the Middle East exemplify how Syrian insurgents change their methods and messages on new media to garner external support.

Gaining Support from Syrian Diaspora

Another goal of insurgent information support operations is to connect with and gain the moral and financial support of Syrian diaspora. Countries with the largest Syrian population outside of the Arabic speaking countries are the United States, Canada, Sweden, and France.[65] Insurgent groups have made deliberate efforts to target these groups.

Some diaspora follow LCC Facebook pages to get neighborhood-level updates of the conflict. A 25-year-old Syrian immigrant living in New York learned of the death of his uncle, cousin, and brother in three different attacks all via the LCC Facebook page from his hometown.[66] The LCCs often post updates in both Arabic and English to enable those who do not speak Arabic to stay connected. This employment of new media enables Syrians around the world to stay engaged with the conflict and provide support for the operations.

Another example of using new media to target diaspora is an iPhone and Android application called Souria Was Bas ("Only Syria") that, according to the app's English description, spreads news and videos about Syria as quickly as possible.[67] A group headquartered within Syria maintains the app and pushes the latest YouTube and Twitter information to the user in English and Arabic. Although the information originates in Syria, it seems that this app is targeting people outside of Syria since iPhones have been banned within the country since December 2011.[68]

Insurgent groups also target Syrians around the globe via their websites. The Suquor Al-Sham Brigade, a member of the Islamic Front, maintains a website available not only in Arabic, but also in English and French, the primary languages of the countries of three of the top four Syrian diaspora populations outside of the Middle East.[69] The use of these specific languages suggests that the group specifically designed the website to garner support from those outside of

the region. The site highlights the successes and challenges of the brigade and has a link where visitors can donate money to support their operations.

Non-Syrians in the West

Perhaps the most difficult support, whether it is financial, political, or moral, to gain is that of non-Syrian citizens in Western states; it is unlikely that many non-Syrian Westerners will seek out insurgent group websites. Thus, insurgent groups rely primarily on what messages are translated into different languages and released. In spite of the challenges associated with the lack of traditional journalism inside Syria, insurgents understand that Western populations may view their videos via YouTube or via traditional news outlets if the video is re-broadcast.

One of the best examples of video footage from the civil war causing an impact on Western support is the amount of video available from a chemical weapons attack just outside of Damascus on 21 August 2013. Within five days of the incident, users posted almost 200 videos related to the attack on YouTube.[70] The US government referenced these videos in official documents regarding the attack when it was determining if the Syrian government crossed President Barack Obama's "red line" with respect to use of chemical weapons.[71]

The videos posted of the chemical attacks were generally roughly edited, most were not translated, and many did not contain DOGs. The general message in these videos was clear enough without needing to target to a specific group. However, in many other situations, insurgent groups have made concerted efforts to edit videos that highlight their group's actions for Western consumption. Opposition-run news networks, such as the Shaam News Network, compile these videos from insurgent groups and then add English subtitles and descriptions before posting them to their YouTube page. Insurgent groups also tailor which videos they make available to which target population. The videos available on the Shaam News Network's Arabic

YouTube page are not the same as those available on the English page.[72] It appears that the videos selected for translation share a narrative insurgents believe will gain them support from the population in the West.

Furthermore, the Arabic and English sites have distinctly different content to garner different types of support. The Shaam News Network's Arabic YouTube channel consists of multiple videos a day sharing the latest news and events, showing the efficacy of their actions with the intention of gaining political and financial support. The English page consists of select videos with titles like, "Daily Regime Shelling Reduces City to Ruble" and "Children Starve to Death as World Debates Geneva 2", intended to gain moral and political support from English speaking audiences.

Recommendations

New media, in its various forms, enables non-state actors to conduct deliberate and effective information operation campaigns that target the audience they desire. Through the use of new media, insurgent groups have leveled the playing field in information operations between them and state actors and made their actions within Syria more effective. The US military must look for ways to achieve and maintain information superiority in its own counterinsurgency operations in light of these new technologies. The US military must understand the challenges associated with countering uses of new media as well as develop strategies to employ new media to its advantage.

Countering Adversary New Media Information Operations

Two possible ways to counter new media information operations are denying the adversary access to the internet and discrediting the information posted to new media by the adversary. Both ways are difficult, often unproductive, and potentially even counterproductive. The first

way, denying the adversary access to the internet, is extremely challenging. Identifying a single node to target via kinetic or non-kinetic effects to disrupt access across a region is troublesome, especially with advances in wireless cellular internet networks. Using a firewall to block access to certain websites used by the adversary also has limited utility because, as demonstrated in Syria, users can access internet sites via proxy servers beyond the firewall. The pervasiveness of the internet makes it extremely challenging to disrupt its accessibility for extended periods in locations where it is well established.

Shutting internet access down completely has several detrimental second-order effects as well. First, disrupting internet service could upset the local population who may use the internet for peaceful purposes and actually turn them against those responsible for the interruption in service. Second, shutting down adversary new media cuts off a valuable and exploitable intelligence source.[73] Groups in Syria use new media, specifically social media, to organize supporters for protests and military operations. They post videos and images of the equipment and weapons they have procured, often to thank financial supporters. Following the social media accounts of different groups can help determine where they are receiving support for their operations. Counterinsurgency operations can also exploit certain tactics, techniques, and procedures shared via new media. Moreover, analysis of Syrian insurgent groups' uses of new media has demonstrated how new media is used to determine the objectives, alliances, and organization of insurgent groups. For example, new insurgent groups in Syrian often reveal their formation via new media. Looking at the emblems used by the new groups can show which coalition the group aligned with, thus indicating where they might act and how to best counter their efforts. A third side effect of shutting down new media access is that it prohibits the United States and friendly forces from using it to advance their own purposes. Reviewing the way the

insurgency in Syria has used new media, the US military should look for ways to be equally effective with their new media information support operations.

A second way to counter an adversary's new media information operations is to discredit information the adversary posts to new media. This may also be unproductive, especially in counterinsurgency operations. The population does not hold insurgents to the same standard of accurate information that the counterinsurgency must uphold. Galula states, "The asymmetrical situation has important effects on propaganda. The insurgent, having no responsibility, is free to use every trick; if necessary, he can lie, cheat, exaggerate. He is not obliged to prove; he is judged by what he promises, not by what he does."[74] Insurgent groups in Syria have posted false information, but even when the regime highlights this information, there seems to be little effect on the insurgents' support.[75] However, the military needs to monitor and be aware of the adversary's use of new media so they can react to inaccurate information when questioned by traditional media sources or political leaders.[76]

Recommendations for New Media Military Information Support Operations

Insurgent operations in Syria have demonstrated the usefulness of new media, and the Department of Defense needs to expand its military information support operations into this medium. Insurgents in Syria recognize new media as an information weapon and are deliberately exploiting it to gain support. Many of the same tactics, techniques and procedures used by the insurgents can be adapted by US forces across the range of military operations, particularly in counterinsurgency operations. New media operations do not need to be covert. In fact, when changing or strengthening a population's stance is the objective, correct attribution of operations is as important for the counterinsurgency as it is for the insurgency.

First, the US military needs to determine the audience for its new media operations. The insurgents have clearly developed clear messages that target specific audiences. Although multiple audiences can view the information shared via new media, the message, language, and even website design allows insurgents to aim the information at specific groups. A research paper from the US Army War College on military uses for social media published in 2011 highlighted this point when it stated, "The most important issue when determining which tools to use is to be very clear in what types of problems the organization is trying to solve and who is the targeted audience for the identified strategic initiatives."[77] In other words, understanding how the intended audience uses new media should direct what form of new media is used for the operations.

After identifying the target audience, forces need to conduct information operations in a method that will have the greatest impact on the targeted audience. Currently, the US military uses embedded news reporters, field interviews, and press conferences to disseminate information for public consumption during operations. However, these methods rely on traditional news sources to share the information, thus taking control of both the timing of release and message sent out of the hands of the military. Using new media enables the military to control the release of such critical information. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, George Little, stated, "We operate in a world so tightly connected that every world event, big or small, can be felt in real time."[78] In order to take advantage of our highly integrated world, the US military must adopt some of the new media methods exemplifed by the Syrian insurgents to spread the US military narrative to the appropriate audiences when and how it most benefits their objectives.

The US military recently employed some uses of new media. In May 2007, Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNFI) began a YouTube channel that posted videos taken by US forces in Iraq.[79] The channel's intention is to portray the war thru the viewpoint of the military member on the ground in Iraq.[80] Much like those of the Syrian insurgents, the videos show a combination of combat successes and community relations operations in Iraq.[81] The MNFI YouTube channel is reaching an audience beyond those reached by traditional media. Its most popular video, "Battle on Haifa Street, Baghdad, Iraq," has over 4.9 million views.[82]

One advantage of new media has is its ability to be shared on a global network almost instantly. The insurgents in Syria are able to film, edit, and upload videos on operations within a short time span. They use LCCs and Twitter to share information real time on operations. To effectively counter these messages, the US military needs to empower service members at the tactical level to share information via new media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Much in the same way a fire support officer at the company level can act without higher headquarters approval, each unit could have a public affairs trained individual who has the ability to effectively share the unit's story across new media.[83] If properly empowered via mission command, the selected individual will understand the desired narrative of the operation and be able to share information with the appropriate audience. This method of low-level information sharing can target specific audiences and have the potential to counter the quick uploads of insurgent information operations. The current delay between when insurgents share their side of a story via new media and when the US military shares its side with the media via a press conference can be shortened with this tactic for some situations. The importance of clear mission command for information operations is vital, but, as illustrated, the payoff could be significant.

Military planners at all levels need to understand how new media can be used to share a specific military narrative. Imperatively, those individuals executing the information operations need to understand how an audience perceives information when it is posted to specific new media sites. For example, some viewers may view a video posted to the official US Army Facebook page as propaganda or a recruiting tool. However, the same video posted to the Facebook page of the Salad ah-Din Provincial Reconstruction Team may appear more honest because it is coming from the forces on the ground engaged in the operation. All videos and images posted by official Department of Defense channels should be branded with DOGs. By branding the media, the Department of Defense receives credit for the actions and they can refute any non-branded media as un-official. None of the just over 40 videos remaining on the MNFI YouTube channel have DOGs. When these videos are shared, it is not obvious to the viewer who is responsible for the content. Furthermore, the matter of which emblem is used for the DOG for official media is also important. A video with the US Air Force emblem may be seen as a biased recruiting or propaganda video, while the same video branded with the emblem of the 24th Special Tactics Squadron may be viewed as more impartial since it is coming from the those executing the mission. A thorough understanding of the new media landscape is necessary to understand how to present information to convey the desired narrative.

Conclusion

To paraphrase General Eisenhower, the US military needs to learn from the new media experiences of the Syrian insurgents to profit in future military operations.[84] The Syrian civil war demonstrates that new media enables state and non-state actors alike to share their narrative to a wide audience without the assistance of traditional media sources. The Syrian rebels executed deliberate information support operations targeting four distinct audiences for distinct reasons:

the population within Syria for moral and political support, the population within Middle East states for financial support, the Syrian diaspora for moral and financial support, and the population in the West for moral, financial, and political support. Examining how the insurgents used new media to direct their messages reveals techniques that the US military must explore to enhance their information operations in the prolific new media environment.

Endnotes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography)

1. "Public Opinion Wins Wars," *Prescott Evening Courier*, 4.
2. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Syrian civil war."
3. Syria Deeply, "Timeline."
4. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Syrian civil war."
5. Syria Deeply, "Timeline."
6. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Syrian civil war."
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 2.
10. Sinjab, "Syria Cirsis."
11. O'Bagy, Free Syrian Army, 9.
12. "اعلان تشكيل الجيش السوري الحر", YouTube video, 4:10, posted by "أحمد الأحمد," 29 July 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZcCbIPM37w.
13. O'Bagy, Free Syrian Army, 9.
14. Atassi, "Major Syrian Rebel Groups."
15. "The Islamic Front: Largest Rebel Group Merger Aims at Establishing Islamic State in Syria," YouTube video, 3:52, posted by "Eretz Zen," 23 November 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TrIsqiG8WU.
16. Langley, "Verifying Sources," 3.
17. Ibid., 4.
18. Ibid., 4.
19. Lynch, Freelon, and Aday, *Syria's Socially Mediated Civil* War, 7.
20. Beiser, "Syria, Iraq, Egypt."
21. Zambelis, "Information Wars," 20.
22. *Cambridge Dictionaries*, s.v. "new media."
23. Kaylan, "Syria's War Viewed Almost in Real Time."
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Setrakian and Zerden, "Mapping the Information Sharing," 135.
27. Ibid., 138.
28. Ibid., 139.
29. Langley, "Verifying Sources," 4.
30. Beifuss and Bellini, *Branding Terror,* 11.
31. Ibid., 12.
32. Giordano, "Study of a Storm," 22.
33. Ibid., 22.
34. Historic Insights, "The Free Syria Flag."
35. Ibid.
36. Mirodan, "Syria's Revolution."
37. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 4.

38. Ibid., 4.

39. Ibid., 12.

40. Joint Publication 3-13, *Information Operations,* II-9 – II-10.

41. Berman, "Syrian Rebel Use of Social Media."

42. International Telecommunication Union, "Statistics."

43. Berman, "Syrian Rebel Use of Social Media."

44. "أحمد عاصي, 5 ",الوية صقور الشام تقوم باعادة تاهيل المدارس" YouTube video, 1:45, posted by
October 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbX596RucEg.

45. "لواء الأمة مشروع إنشاء مشفى ميداني", YouTube video, 2:53, posted by "Liwaalummah, 22
August 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBK_R8z6a1Q&feature=youtu.be.

46. Carniegie Endowment, "Local Coordination Comittees."

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Mitchell, "Facebooking the Syrian Revolution."

50. Berman, "Syrian Rebel Use of Social Media."

51. Ibid.

52. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 23-24.

53. Zambelis, "Information Wars," 21.

54. Lynch, Freelon, and Aday, *Syria's Socially Mediated Civil* War, 6.

55. Ibid., 6.

56. Al-Tawhid Brigade Website: http://tawheedidlib.com/wp/?p=457.

57. Al-Tawhid Brigade Website comments: http://tawheedidlib.com/wp/?page_id=27.

58. Kaylan, "Syria's War Viewed Almost in Real Time."

59. Ibid.

60. Ronfeldt, Arquilla, Fuller, and Fuller, *Zapatista Social Netwar*, 66.

61. Berman, "Syrian Rebel Use of Social Media."

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Hajaj al-Ajmi Twitter page: https://twitter.com/hajjajalajmi

65. Organization for Economic Co-operation, *Connecting with Emigrants,* 298.

66. Mitchell, "Facebooking the Syrian Revolution."

67. Information from iPhone app store for "Souria Was Bas."

68. BBC News, "Syria 'Bans iPhones'."

69. Suquor Al-Sham Brigade website: http://shamfalcons.net (not available as of 14 April
2014, previously accessed on 20 March 2014)

70. Dinan, "Syrians Use Social Media."

71. Ibid.

72. Shaam News Network Arabic YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/shamnewssnn
Shaam News Network English YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/user/ShaamEnglishNews/featured

73. Khalil, "Jihadbook," 17.

74. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*" 9.

75. Langley, "Verifying Sources," 11.

76. Caldwell, Stroud, and Menning, "Fostering a Culture," 14.

77. Lehman, "Military Engagement," 22.

78. Parrish, "Pentagon Spokesman."

79. Carruthers, *Media at War*, 247.

80. Ibid., 247

81. MNFI YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/MNFIRAQ

82. "Battle on Haifa Street, Baghdad, Iraq," YouTube video, 2:58, posted by "MNFIRAQ," 10 March 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlNORX006-c.

83. Interview with Major from Air Command and Staff College, 1 April 2014.

84. "Public Opinion Wins Wars," *Prescott Evening Courier*, 4.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atassi, Basma. "Major Syrian Rebel Groups Join Forces." *AlJazeera.com*. 22 November 2013. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/11/major-syrian-rebel-groups-join-forces-20131122141129975421.html (accessed 13 April 2014).

BBC News. "Syria 'Bans iPhones' Over Protest Footage." *BBC.com*, 2 December 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16009975 (accessed 13 April 2014).

Beifuss, Artur, and Francesco Trivini Bellini. *Branding Terror: The Logotypes and Iconography of Insurgent Groups and Terrorist Organizations*. London: Merrell, 2013.

Beiser, Elana. "Syria, Iraq, Egypt Most Deadly Nations for Journalists." *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 30 December 2013. https://cpj.org/reports/2013/12/syria-iraq-egypt-most-deadly-nations-for-journalis.php (accessed 14 April 2014).

Berman, Asher. "Syrian Rebel Use of Social Media." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. October 2012. http://www.fpri.org/articles/2012/10/syrian-rebel-use-social-media (accessed 13 April 2012).

Caldwell, Lt Gen Willaim B., IV, Lt Col Shawn Stroud, and Anton Menning. "Fostering a Culture of Engagement." *Military Review* 89, no. 5 (September – October 2009): 10-18.

Cambridge Dictionaries Online. s.v. "new media." http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/british/new-media (accessed 13 April 2014).

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Local Coordination Committees." http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=50426&reloadFlag=1 (accessed 13 April 2013).

Carruthers, Susan L. *The Media at War*. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Dinan, Stephan. "Syrians Use Social Media to Tell World: See Atrocities for Yourself." *Washington Times*, 2 September 2013. http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/sep/2/syrians-use-social-media-to-tell-world-see-atrocit/ (accessed 13 April 2014).

Encyclopædia Britannica Online. s. v. "Syrian civil war." http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1781371/Syrian-Civil-War (accessed 6 April 214).

Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1964.

Giordano, Angela Maria. "Study of a Storm: An Analysis of Zapatista Propaganda." Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1997.

Historic Insights Consulting. "The Free Syria Flag."
    http://www.historicinsights.com/2012/07/banners-above-sand.html#!/2012/07/banners-above-sand.html (accessed 13 April 2014).

International Telecommunication Union. "Statistics: Households with Internet Access at Home."
    http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx (accessed 13 April 2014).

Joint Publication 3-13. *Information Operations*, 27 November 2012.

Kaylan, Melik. "Syria's War Viewed Almost in Real Time." *Wall Street Journal*, 27 September 2013.
    http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324492604579083112566791956 (accessed 13 April 2014).

Khalil, Ezzeldeen. "Jihadbook – The Evolution of Online Islamist Forums." *Jane's Intelligence Review* 24, no. 11 (November 2012): 14-18.

Langley, Alison. "Verifying Sources: Syria as a Case Study." Webster University Vienna, 2012.
    http://www.webster.ch/research/media (accessed 13 April 2014).

Lehman, Lt Col Johnathan H. "Military Engagement with Social Media." USAWC Civilian Research Project. Carlisle Barracks, PA : U.S. Army War College, 2011.

Lynch, Marc, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday. *Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War*. Peaceworks Report 91. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, January 2014.

Mirodan, Seamus. "Syria's Revolution is Being Branded." *The Guardian*, 7 September 2012.
    http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/07/syria-rebels-revolution-designer-logo (accessed 13 April 2014).

Mitchell, Justin. "Facebooking the Syrian Revolution." *Latitude News*.
    http://www.latitudenews.com/story/facebooking-the-syrian-revolution/ (accessed 13 April 2014).

O'Bagy, Elizabeth. *The Free Syrian Army*. ISW Middle East Security Report 9. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, March 2013.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Connecting with Emigrants: A Global Profile of Diasporas*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012.

Parrish, Karen. "Pentagon Spokesman: Public Affairs Must Change with Times." *Defense.gov*, 25 July 2013. http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=120522 (accessed 13 April 2014).

"Public Opinion Wins Wars." *Prescott Evening Courier*, 4 May 1944.

Ronfeldt, David, John Arquilla, Graham E. Fuller, and Melissa Fuller. *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998.

Setrakian, Lara, and Alex Zerden. "Mapping the Information Sharing Ecosystem of Syria." *Prisim* 4, Syria Supplement (2014): 133-143.

Sinjab, Lina. "Syria Crisis: Guide to Armed and Political Opposition." *BBC.com*, 13 December 2013. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24403003 (accessed 13 April 2014).

Syria Deeply. "Timeline." http://www.syriadeeply.org/timeline (accessed 6 April 2014).

Zambelis, Chris. "Information Wars: Assessing the Social Media Battlefield in Syria." *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 7 (July 2012): 19-21.